

Statement on the Department of Justice's Report on Crime June 1, 1997

Four years ago, my administration made a commitment to take our streets back from crime and violence. We have a comprehensive anticrime plan, and it is working. More community police, tougher punishments, and fewer guns in the hands of criminals are making a difference. Today's Justice Department release marks the largest one-year decline in murder, aggravated assault, and violent crime in the past 35 years. The continued downward trend over the past 4 years is further evidence that we are on the right track with increased community policing, tougher penalties, and greater juvenile crime prevention efforts.

Much work remains to be done, however. Juvenile crime and violence must be our top law enforcement priority for the next 4 years. My anti-gang and youth violence strategy declares

war on juvenile crime and gangs, with new prosecutors and tougher penalties; an extension of the Brady bill, so violent teenage criminals will never have the right to purchase a handgun; and resources to keep schools open after hours, on weekends, and in the summer. While the House-passed juvenile crime legislation falls short of the goals outlined in my strategy, I am hopeful that the Senate will improve on this measure and pass it without delay. We must keep the crime rate coming down, and every child's prospect of a bright future going up.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 30, but it was embargoed for release until 6 p.m. on June 1.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Deployment of United States Forces to Sierra Leone May 30, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

On May 25, soldiers from the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) mutinied against the country's democratically elected President, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Battles between the mutineers and the President's Nigerian security guard resulted in several rocket propelled grenade rounds hitting the U.S. Embassy. In addition, the RSLMF soldiers have engaged in looting, rape, armed robbery, and carjackings throughout the city. Sporadic gunfire and looting diminished with the arrival of additional Nigerian military forces that attempted to restore order. However, the security situation is deteriorating as tensions rise between Nigerian troops on the one hand and the mutineers and their supporters on the other hand. While there is no evidence that Americans are being directly targeted, the disorder and violence in Freetown subjects American citizens to continued risks ranging from criminal acts to random violence.

On May 29 and May 30, due to the uncertain security situation and the possible threat to American citizens and the American Embassy in Sierra Leone, approximately 200 U.S. military personnel, including an 11-member special forces detachment, were positioned in Freetown to prepare for the evacuation of certain U.S. Government employees and private U.S. citizens. Evacuation operations began on May 30, as U.S. military helicopters transported U.S. citizens and designated third-country nationals to immediate safety aboard the U.S.S. *Kearsarge* from where they will be taken to Conakry, Guinea, for further transportation. In addition to those evacuated by helicopter, 18 U.S. citizens departed Sierra Leone on May 29 via a British charter airline flight.

The Marines involved in this operation are from the Marine Expeditionary Unit currently embarked aboard U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, operating off the west coast of Africa. Special forces personnel are from the U.S. Army Third Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Although